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The Pendulum of Fashion Has Swung Back to White Sulphur Springs

“DOING THE SPRINGS” IN THE SOUTH

HEALTH resorts have from time immemorial been notably pleasant places. It has always seemed that the most agreeably dissipated were the soonest in need of health, and that folly and fashion were the first to acquire fresh strength.

“Mineral springs,” especially, have profited by this very human tendency. It is the pomp and glitter of Bath, of Spa, of Homburg, of Ems, of Baden-Baden, of Aix-les-Bains upon the older continent which comes most easily to the mind, not the virtues of their healing waters. And today, if properly medicated fountains could only be induced to gush forth from Monte Carlo’s lovely rock by the blue Mediterranean, or from Trouville-Deauville’s tawny sands upon that emerald coast of Normandy, it is unquestionable that their value for health would be almost the greatest in Europe.

This tradition of pleasure-seeking has enlivened more centuries than our own, more continents than Europe. Here in America, as the turmoil of the Revolutionary War died down and life came again to have a softer aspect people began, in the pleasant manner that had come down from the eighteenth century, to “take the waters.” For more than a half-century the history of the White Sulphur Springs was the history of the country—a long, picturesque, romantic chapter of our national life, mellow now with age and fragrant with memories.

It is a chapter particularly interesting and pertinent today, when fashion’s pendulum, with its long, sure swing is again making it the mode to travel “to the springs.” In the peaceful green valleys of Virginia are now extravagantly luxurious hotels and bathing establishments. Luxury and pleasure are, of course, never out of fashion; what is to be noted is the present tremendous vogue of health. It may be because all gowns are so unreticent nowadays, or because all ladies, even old ones, are so young—in any case, red meat and rich sauces, champagne and burgundy are gradually disappearing from the highest and gayest tables. There are fashionable seasons of the year when nobody who is anybody eats more than a slice of the breast of chicken and a fresh green pea, or drinks more than a cool cup of water from the spring. Possibly on the principle of no cross, no crown, some trifling ailment has again become absolutely essential to social position—if not an ailment of your own, then some one else’s. Indeed, just as it used to be the best style to take a child along as an excuse for going to the circus, so perhaps the pleasantest way to visit a modern watering-place is for the purpose of boiling the rheumatism out of an elderly relative. To tuck such an invalid safely into bed and out of harm’s way before going to the card-table or ball-room makes you feel what a blessing to others ill health, rightly treated, may become.

"In the old days, one twinge of the gout in *paterfamilias'* toe sufficed to start a whole caravan to the springs," writes Mr. Harrison Rhodes, in his book, "In Vacation America," published by Harper & Brothers. In those times it was the habit of many Southern gentlemen to own their cottages, generally called simply "cabins," at their favourite cure in the Virginia mountain country.

It is pleasant to think of them driving to the watering-places in the old days, though in 1839 the hope was expressed that the railroad would soon come near enough to the Greenbriar White Sulphur—the famous "Old White"—to bring the springs within three days of New York; but the philosophical consolation was offered—in case the railroad project failed—by reminding people that twenty years earlier, in 1819, the journey had taken a month.

It would be a pleasure to recapture upon this page something of the life and gaiety of those early days of the Old White. There was always a great deal of dancing—even morning "hops" existed there long before the present craze brought daylight dancing into general fashion. It sounds quaint to read in the old memoirs that Floridian families introduced and made popular a Spanish dance—doubtless the tango of its day. What the French term *le bon motif* reigned supreme. It was the era of the young girl; and the Old White, though frisky, was no place for frisky matrons. Marriage was the one object of the summer. Even as late as the

seventies or eighties it was said that purses were made up in little Southern towns to send likely maids or youths to the marriage mart of the Old White. The wood walks near the hotel were significantly labelled Lover's Rest, Lover's Walk, Courtship Maze, and, finally, Acceptance Way to Paradise!

Life even in mid-century days must have been on a tremendous scale at the Old White—a legend heard in childhood was that the dining-room of the hotel was so enormous that the waiters served on horseback! This old hotel has been replaced, of course, on a new but equally tremendous scale. There is French furniture now, and the bills are higher. There is a bathing-pool which might have been the pride of Rome. Something of the Old World atmosphere is gone, as it is gone at the Hot, where even as late as the eighties there was only a small, dilapidated, red-brick hotel intermittently open. But it would be wrong to regret the gallant way in which the old Virginian springs have again become the haunt of fashion. Golf and auction replace the drive to Lewisburg to hear a speech, and the honeymoon itself has perhaps made "Courtship's Maze" a useless provision. But nothing can alter the loveliness of the landscape nor the qualities of the climate. And if Fashion now chooses to come in the spring and fall rather than in summer, it is quite possible that she considers two seasons better than one. Where else, to close the discussion, can a lady wear her best gowns in April or October?